

Foreign Embassies — The 'Social' Spies

By Tad Szulc
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Every foreign embassy in every foreign capital engages in the "social" collection of political intelligence, and the Soviet Union is no exception. This is a very sophisticated form of political espionage.

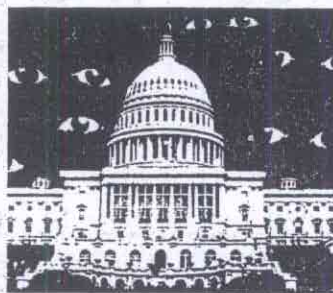
It is common, for instance, for Soviet diplomats to invite Washington correspondents for lunch to pump them for information and interpretation of political events. Chances are that they will learn precious little that is new beyond what can be learned in the daily press, but there could be accidental exceptions.

Besides, this system has the self-serving quality of allowing the diplomat, a KGB agent or not, to write in his report that "famous columnist so-and-so told me today that..."

Interestingly, the Russians have a penchant for entertaining their American guests at the most famous and expensive French restaurants in Washington. Newsmen usually agree to these lunch sessions because they expect to hear, in return, the current Soviet line on a given topic.

But this relationship has dangers: During the Nixon administration, for example, several well-known Washington correspondents were tailed by the FBI after a Soviet or Eastern European lunch, had their phones tapped, and were accused in internal Bureau papers of having contacts with "foreign intelligence."

Dinners and cocktail parties are also used by Soviet diplomats to extract political intelligence from



newsmen, government officials, congressmen and fellow diplomats. It is virtually impossible to have a purely social conversation with a Soviet diplomat at a Washington cocktail party. The man seems to have an agenda and, drink in hand, he corners a more or less prominent American to go down his list of questions. "What do you think of the Begin-Sadat summit at Camp David? Do you think the Senate will approve a SALT treaty?" — and so on and on into the Washington night.

These extensive overt activities notwithstanding, the Russians still go in heavily for classical espionage. Buying secrets from workers in defense industries, military installations, or even intelligence agencies could be the province of the network run by the KGB "rezident" at the embassy, or of an "illegal" network like the one operated in the 1950s by the famous Colonel Rudolph Abel, who was subsequently caught by the FBI.

It doesn't follow that the official KGB "rezident" is aware of the activities by the "illegal" network. In fact, chances are that he is not. The more compartmentalized the espionage effort, the safer it is. The FBI and the CIA counterintel-

ligence staffs can monitor embassy-based KGB agents fairly well — though not always. It is "illegal" networks that worry them the most; even if one is compromised, it is impossible to know whether there are others still functioning.

It is because of this that American counterespionage has to rely on double agents, never knowing whether they might in reality be dealing with triple agents. The Shadrin case is a good example. Nobody knows whether Igor's approach to Helms was KGB bait to trap Shadrin, or whether the Russians really planned to fit him into an "illegal" apparatus. But the stakes were so high — likewise the CIA's and the FBI's greed — that he was strongly encouraged to fly from his Washington home in Vienna for the KGB encounter. It may have cost him his life.

Meanwhile, Washington's intelligence battles are no longer confined to the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The city is now fertile ground for direct activities by "friendly" intelligence services — Israelis, assorted Arabs, South Koreans, Iranians, South Africans, Chileans and Filipinos being the most obvious examples — serving their special interests.

Espionage in Washington by "unfriendly" and "friendly" alike has reached such a point that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence announced last June that it will "specifically report on both the magnitude of the Soviet threat as well as the adequacy of the U.S. response," that it is "concerned" about the "intelligence activities" of "some friendly countries here."

Tomorrow: The 'friendly' spies.